DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 617 FL 027 102

AUTHOR	Davy, Lynn
TITLE	Developing a Dual-Language Program.
INSTITUTION	National Association of Elementary School Principals, Alexandria, VA.
ISSN	ISSN-0735-0031
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	6p.; Theme issue. Published quarterly.
AVAILABLE FROM	NAESP, National Principals Resource Center, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3483 (single copies, $2.50; Bulk orders, $2). Tel: 800-386-2377 (Toll Free); Fax: 800-396-2377 (Toll Free). Web site: http://www.naesp.org. $2.50 each; bulk orders, 10 or more, $2.00 each.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT	Here's How; v20 n1 Fall 2001
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Bilingual Education Programs; *Bilingualism; Computer Uses in Education; English (Second Language); National Programs; *Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Spanish; Spanish Speaking
IDENTIFIERS	*Two Way Bilingual Education

ABSTRACT

This newsletter issue contains the following article and features: "Developing a Dual-Language Program" (Lynn Davey); Principal's Perspective: "Battling for Bilingualism" (Maurice P. Downey, Jr.); and Web Resources. Davey's article describes how the principal of a Phoenix elementary school managed the transformation of a traditional bilingual education program into a dual language program. Topics covered include the following: community involvement, staffing, teacher support, parent involvement, staff development, academic achievement, and "timely tips." (KFT)

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Here's HOW

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

VOLUME 20, NUMBER 1

FALL 2001

Developing a Dual-Language Program

Lynn Davey

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Developing a Dual-Language Program

Lynn Davey

The William T. Machan School serves 850 K-8 children in inner-city Phoenix, Arizona, on a year-round schedule. Almost 90 percent are Hispanic and 97 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Six years ago, we became concerned that our school's bilingual program wasn't working. Our Spanish-speaking students weren't learning sufficient English, nor were our English-speaking students learning much Spanish. We also had serious concerns about the academic achievement of our students with limited English proficiency.

Our traditional bilingual program had English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students split up for two-hour blocks each day. With Spanish speakers making up 65 percent of our students, this made for very unbalanced classes. We wondered if switching to a dual-language program, in which all students are taught in both languages, might work.

Lynn Davey is principal of William T. Machan School in Phoenix, Arizona. Her e-mail address is **lynn_davey@creighton.k12.az.us**.

During the 1996-1997 school year, we spent a great deal of time and effort researching and visiting dual-language programs. A team headed by our special projects coordinator attended a series of seminars on dual-language instruction, which provided relevant research and gave us an opportunity to learn from practitioners. Convinced that a dual-language program would be right for us, we rewrote our Title VII grant in the spring of 1997 to implement it.

A Year of Restructuring

The first year of the grant we devoted to further research and planning. There were many decisions to be made. A critical one was to have students taught by teams of English-speaking and bilingual teachers. This arrangement would allow us to group all classes heterogeneously, without regard for language.

Staff development specific to dual-language instruction was crucial, and we were fortunate in having an excellent dual-language teacher from a nearby school make an informative presentation. Our Title VII project director also made a number of presentations and formed a dual-language study group that met weekly after school. Teachers attended a number of conferences and visited dual-language schools as far away as New York, Florida, and Ecuador. We also arranged for Arizona State University to offer a class on second-language acquisition.

That spring we conducted interviews to determine which of our teachers were interested in participating in the dual-language program. To our pleasant surprise, we found that we had more teachers interested than we had available positions.

The next year, we began the program with eight dual-language classrooms in kindergarten through third grade. In these classrooms students were heterogeneously grouped, with approximately 60 percent Spanish-speaking and 40 percent English-speaking students. Children were not separated by language, but remained together for the entire day with the team teachers splitting the instructional time—half in English and half in Spanish.

Involving the Community

Before we implemented the program, we hosted several meetings in which teachers and administrators described the dual-language program and how it would benefit the children. Parents were encouraged to ask questions, and we offered them a choice between dual-language and traditional bilingual classrooms, as well as English-only instruction. Because of the respect that parents

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had for the school, and their confidence that the change would be beneficial, many of them chose the dual-language program.

Thanks to the ongoing support of district administrators, parents, and teachers, our dual-language program has thrived and continues to expand by one grade level each year. This year, dual-language instruction is available from kindergarten through sixth grade, and our entire K-3 program is dual-language.

For those of you who may consider a dual-language program, these are the major elements for success:

Staffing

To maintain a quality dual-language program, you need to recruit a quality bilingual staff. Arizona State University helped by encouraging bilingual education students to student-teach with us. Since many of those students wind up teaching for us, we are able to train our own bilingual teachers. This year we have 21 teachers certified to teach English as a Second Language, with 16 of them being bilingual. We have also recruited bilingual staff in positions such as special education, social work, school psychologist, assistant principal, speech therapist, and librarian.

Although recruiting and retaining bilingual teacher assistants has been challenging, we have begun a partnership with a local community college that we hope will help. The school assigns students to teacher assistant internships at our school. We also provide tuition reimbursement when our teacher assistants successfully complete their college classes.

Teacher Support

It's important to support your teachers during a major restructuring like dual-language instruction. We've used Title VII funds to provide teachers with additional instructional assistants in dual-language classrooms, allowing more opportunities for individualized and small-group instruction. Title VII monies also are available to teachers who wish to do team planning during breaks or on Saturdays, and to add to Spanish literature in our classrooms and library. Curriculum materials for math and science are available in both languages.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement and support have been crucial to the success of our dual-language program. We have always encouraged parents to visit and volunteer in classrooms, and during the 2000-2001 school year we had almost 600 volunteers work more than 8,000 hours. We have also continued to offer parent information on the dual-language program.

Our parent involvement efforts paid off last year when Arizona voters passed Proposition 203, "English for the Children." This proposition had the potential of seriously jeopardizing our dual language program. Fortunately, our district board was receptive to input from the community—including our Machan parents—and allowed our dual-language program to continue. The impact of Proposition 203 on our school could have been very different if we did not have an informed and supportive group of parents.

Staff Development

Twelve years ago, we decided to lengthen the school day on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday in order to have an early-release day on Wednesday for staff development. As a year-round school, we also paid teachers for staff development during intersessions. However, our most meaningful staff development has come from long-term programs like the three-year Reading Initiative sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English. We continue

Timely Tips

Principals interested in initiating a dual-language program should keep these key points in mind:

- Hire quality bilingual staff throughout the school, including not only classroom teachers but receptionists and social workers.
- Give teachers time to research, talk about, and visit dual-language class rooms both before and after beginning the program.
- Assure teachers of your continuing support and commitment during such a major change.
- Discuss the changes with your parents. Be sure they have the opportunity to ask questions and give feedback.
- Make sure that you have the support of your district administration and school board.

Program Definitions

English-only All subject matter is taught in English. The classroom is made up of English Language Learners (ELL) and native speakers with no support for ELL students.

English-only with ESL This is a combination of the use of English with English as a Second Language instruction. The ELL students are taken from their regular classroom for special instruction.

Bilingual Education The ELL student's native language is used to teach and English is increasingly used. Primarily implemented in grades K-3.

Source: Learning and Not Learning English: Latino Students in American Schools, by Guadalupe Valdés. New York: Teachers College Press, 2001.

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to offer opportunities for our teachers to visit other schools and attend national conferences.

Academic Achievement

In order to maintain our program, we had to be accountable for student achievement. Our goal has been to produce not just bilingual but biliterate students. When we started the program, one of our chief concerns was developing oral language proficiency for our students with limited English proficiency. We believe integrating English language learners with native English speakers has helped. Over the past four years, there has been a steady increase in the scores on the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT), which measures English vocabulary, comprehension, syntax, and verbal expression. In the Spring of 2000, 75 percent of our kindergartners, 68 percent of first graders, 76 percent of second graders, 74 percent of third graders, and 84 percent of fourth graders achieved the district standard. At the same time, 83 percent of our English-speaking kindergartners met the standard for the Spanish IPT.

We've also seen improvement in Stanford 9 scores. This past year, 16 of our 18 grade-level classes raised their percentile ranks. For example, our second graders went from the 19th to the 39th percentile in reading, while our fifth graders went from the 27th to the 43rd percentile in math. While we are still striving for increased achievement, the improvement has been substantial. □

The Principal's Perspective

Battling for Bilingualism

Maurice P. Downey, Jr.

As principal of a school where half of the students speak Spanish, I was faced with a challenge to my responsibility for providing a high-quality education for all my students. At a time when bilingual education programs were being proclaimed a colossal failure nearly everywhere, I was convinced that our school needed such a program. Many years of involvement with bilingual programs had convinced me of their effectiveness in acquiring a second language. Moreover, I firmly believed in the value of all of our students being bilingual, no matter what their first language was. The challenge was to win community support.

My first step was to determine why bilingual education was under such aggressive attack. Some of the opposition was rooted in deep but irrational fears about immigrants and non-English speakers. But the widespread opposition to bilingual education was fueled by the fact that many bilingual programs had failed for a variety of reasons. We would need to acknowledge and avoid past failures if we were to devise a quality program that would help our Spanish-speaking students become proficient in English.

This challenge was made more difficult by Massachusetts' Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) law, limiting bilingual instruction to three years—even though research indicates that gaining proficiency often takes longer. We also had to overcome the belief of many people that once students had a working knowledge of oral English they were ready for English-only classes. In fact, when these students are placed in such classes without appropriate reading and writing skills, failure is inevitable.

We needed to find a way to allow our Spanish-speaking students enough time to gain literacy in their first language before making the transition to English. Otherwise, they were doomed to never gain literacy in either language.

Because there was virtually no political support for bilingual programs, and the affected immigrant families had little clout, we needed to build support by educating the community and widening the constituency favoring bilingual education.

We are currently in the process of transforming our TBE program into a dual-language program where both native Spanish and English speakers learn together, with each language used about equally. Since only half of our students could participate in the dual-language program, we introduced Spanish as a World Language for the rest. Our monolingual teachers are also studying Spanish in specially-designed "Spanish for Staff" courses. Most importantly, we have succeeded in educating our parents and our community about bilingualism by demonstrating the value and reality of learning a second language. □

For More Information

Maurice Downey would be pleased to speak with other principals about his school's program. You can reach him by phone at 508-626-9158, by fax at 508-628-1305, or by e-mail at **mdowney@framingham.k12.ma.us**. His mailing address is Brophy Elementary School, 575 Pleasant Street, Framingham, MA 01701.

Web Resources

Here are some helpful sites and free Web resources on bilingual education:

West Ed has put together a document called "Fostering Academic Success for English Language Learners: What Do We Know?" You can access it online at **www.west-ed.org/policy/pubs/fostering.**

Learn about the programs of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs at **www.ed.gov/offices/OBEMLA.**

The Center for Applied Linguistics provides a wealth of resources at **www.cal.org/topics/bilinged.html.**

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics has produced a brochure for parents called "Why, How, and When Should My Child Learn a Second Language?" The brochure is available online at **www.cal.org/ericcll.**

Here's How (ISSN 075-0031) is published four times during the school year by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Rebecca J. Kesner, editor. Candice Furlan, production editor. Single copies: $2.50; bulk orders (10 or more): $2.00 each. Virginia residents add 4.5% sales tax. Specify date and title of issue when ordering. Checks payable to NAESP must accompany order. Send to NAESP, National Principals Resource Center, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3483.

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by Eleanor Reneé Rodriguez & James Bellanca

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